

In just one year, the Congress Government borrowed Rs 1.27 lakh crore, including loans with and without guarantees. At this rate, in five years, their debt will touch Rs 6.38 lakh crore. The Congress's mismanagement could push debt to Rs 7 lakh crore. Meanwhile, the actual debt contracted by the BRS admin stands at Rs 4.17 lakh crore
 -Harish Rao, BRS MLA

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'India moving forward at 'unprecedented' speed'
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'I left a web series project where I played lead, just so I could be a part of PUSHHPA 2'
 PIZ

DON'T MISS...
'Deeksha Viramana' from tomorrow
 The 'Bhavani Deeksha Viramana' at Sri Durga Malleswara Swamy Varla Devasthanam atop Indrakeeladri in Vijayawada will take place from December 21 to 25, drawing a large number of devotees. NTR District Collector Dr G Lakshminsha chaired a coordination meeting for the event preparations on Wednesday. Following this, the temple's Executive Officer (EO) KS Rama Rao conducted a final review meeting on Thursday at the Mallikharjuna Maha Mandapam to ensure everything was in place. Officials from various...
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Modi reaffirms India-UK ties
 Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Thursday spoke to UK's King Charles and reaffirmed India's commitment to strengthening the comprehensive strategic partnership. During their discussion, they reflected on the historic relationship and emphasized their shared goal of fostering deeper collaboration in various areas. They reaffirmed their commitment to strengthening the Comprehensive Strategic Partnership between the two nations which has been a cornerstone of...
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Job market projected to grow 9 pc: Report
 Hiring activities in 2025 are likely to witness a 9 per cent growth in the country driven by sectors, including IT, retail, telecommunications and banking, financial services, and insurance (BFSI) sectors, a report said on Thursday. According to the latest data from jobs and talent platform foundit (formerly Monster APAC & ME) there will be a 9 per cent hiring growth in the country in 2025, led by IT, retail, telecommunications, and BFSI sectors. With a 10 per cent growth in 2024 and 3 per cent...
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Ashwin deserved a fitting farewell
 Unable to comprehend R Ashwin's sudden decision to retire from international cricket, a shocked World Cup-winning skipper Kapil Dev says the premier off-spinner deserved a fitting farewell, ideally on home soil. Ashwin stunned one and all by calling it quits on Wednesday, right after the Brisbane Test against Australia ended in a draw. Kapil felt Ashwin seemed unhappy with something. "I was shocked by how one of India's greatest cricketers chose to leave the game. The disappointment among the fans...
 -SPORTS

HC upholds lesbian couple's right to live together
 PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA
 The Andhra Pradesh High Court has upheld the right of a lesbian couple to live together, affirming their freedom to choose partners. A bench comprising Justices R Raghunandan Rao and K Maheswara Rao was hearing a habeas corpus petition filed by Kavitha (name changed), one of the women, alleging that her partner Lalitha (name changed) was detained by her father against her will and kept her at his residence in Narsipatnam. The court on Tuesday further directed the parents of Lalitha not to interfere with the relationship of the couple, asserting that their daughter is a major and can make her own decisions. The couple has been 'living together' for the past one year in Vijayawada. Based on a missing complaint by
 Continued on Page 2

CHAOS ON PARLIAMENT PREMISES

2 BJP MPs injured; NDA, Congress file police complaints



Two BJP MPs were hospitalised with injuries as Leader of Opposition Rahul Gandhi became the centre of the ruling party's accusations, including one by a woman MP who said he misbehaved with her. NDA leaders filed a police complaint against him for "attempt to murder, physical assault and incitement". The sordid incident perhaps without parallel started in the morning as BJP and opposition MPs marched towards each other over Union Home Minister Amit Shah's comments on Ambedkar. As the two groups came closer, tempers and voices rose, soon resulting in a melee. Congress president Mallikarjun Kharge said he was pushed so violently that he lost his balance and sat down. "Now they are the ones who are accusing us of shoving them," the 82-year-old said.



PNS ■ NEW DELHI
 Plunging new depths of political animosity, rival MPs screamed and shoved in the forecourt of Parliament on Thursday in unprecedented scenes of unruliness, capping three days of acrimonious debate inside the House over preserving the dignity of B R Ambedkar. Two BJP MPs were hospitalised with injuries as Leader of Opposition Rahul Gandhi became the centre of the ruling party's accusations, including one by a woman MP who said he misbehaved with her. NDA leaders filed a police complaint against him for "attempt to murder, physical assault and incitement".

However, the more apparent injuries were sustained by BJP's Balasore MP Pratap Sarangi, 69, who had to get stitches in the temple. His colleague Mukesh Rajput was also injured in the head.
 Continued on Page 2

JAL JEEVAN MISSION WORKS

AP govt drops Rs 11,401-cr tenders

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA
 The Andhra Pradesh Cabinet decided on Thursday to cancel tenders for 44,195 Jal Jeevan Mission (JJM) works worth Rs 11,401 crore that were initiated during the previous YSRCP government. Information and Public Relations Minister K Parthasarathy announced the decision at a press conference held at the Secretariat in Amaravati. Explaining the rationale, he stated that several projects had either not started or were only 25 per cent complete. "The tenders for these works will be cancelled, and fresh tenders will be invited. Additionally, 33,717 projects at various stages of completion have been approved, with definitive timelines set for their completion," the Minister said. The Jal Jeevan Mission, a central government initiative, aims to provide safe and adequate drinking water to all rural households through individual tap connections by 2024. Parthasarathy added that ongoing projects in water-scarce regions like Pulivendula, Dhone, and Uddanam would continue and be completed.
 Continued on Page 2



- KEY CABINET DECISIONS**
- Fresh tenders to be invited; ongoing projects in water-scarce regions to continue.
 - Criticism of previous government for poor fund utilisation, with only Rs 4,000 crore of Rs 26,824 crore utilised.
 - Review and redesign of poorly planned JJM projects to ensure sustainable water sources.
 - CRDA to utilise Rs 33,138 crore for Amaravati infrastructure, with loans from various banks.
 - Midday meal scheme reinstated for government junior colleges.



Information & Public Relations Minister K. Parthasarathy briefing the media about the decisions taken at the Cabinet meeting on Thursday.



Focus on AI for good governance in AP

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA
 The Andhra Pradesh government is set to integrate Artificial Intelligence (AI) on a large scale to improve administrative efficiency, said K. Dinesh Kumar, CEO of the Real-Time Governance Society (RTGS). Speaking at an AI workshop organised by Google in New Delhi on Thursday, Kumar outlined the government's vision of using AI to transform governance. The workshop followed the recent signing of a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) between Google and RTGS for collaboration on AI initiatives. The session explored AI opportunities, use cases, and their potential integration across various government departments.
 Continued on Page 2

AP unveils new sports policy



PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA
 Minister for Transport, Youth, and Sports, Mandipalli Ramprasad Reddy, stated that under the leadership of Chief Minister Nara Chandrababu Naidu, sports have been given top priority in Andhra Pradesh. On Thursday, the Minister launched a new sports app and the state's sports policy in Vijayawada, emphasising the government's commitment to introducing modern technology in the sports sector. The new sports app, he said, is designed to offer comprehensive information on sports associations, athletes, and events, showcasing the government's efforts to embrace innovations for the benefit of athletes. Highlighting the Chief Minister's focus on technological advancements, the Minister noted that the state is taking steps to improve services for athletes by leveraging modern tools and guiding them towards a stronger future. The Minister also unveiled a pioneering sports policy, the first of its kind in the country, aimed at fostering talent and providing employment opportunities. He added that the state plans to host the National Sports Competition in Amaravati in 2027 to encourage national-level recognition for athletes.
 Continued on Page 2



Leopard caught in farmer's trap, dies
 PNS ■ GANNAVARAM
 A leopard died after getting caught in a trap set by a farmer to protect his crops in Metlapalli village of Gannavaram mandal in Krishna district on Thursday. The farmer, Durga Rao, had set up the trap to deter boars from damaging his 4.5-acre farmland. Unfortunately, the leopard fell victim to the trap on Wednesday night. The incident has sparked concerns among residents, who have reported sightings of leopard footprints in nearby fields. The forest department has been alerted to the situation and is taking measures to address the issue.

21 held for rave party; JSP leader suspended

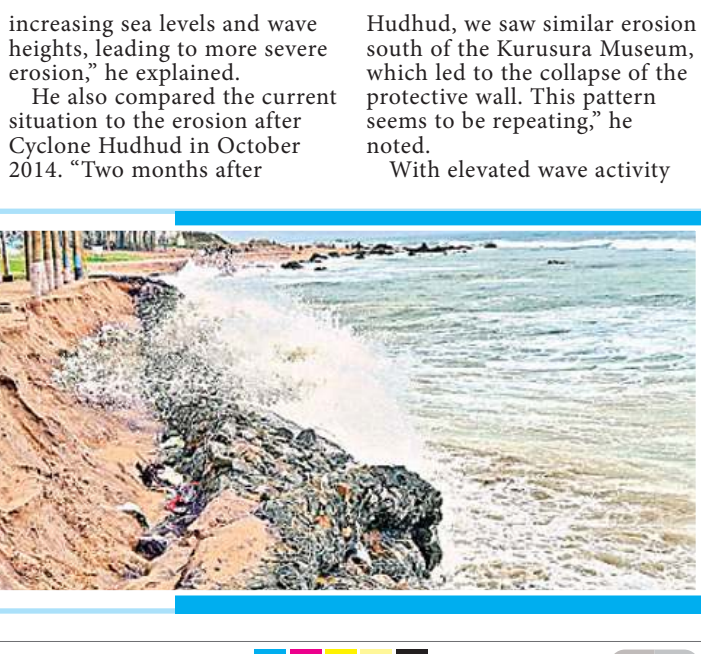
PNS ■ ELURU
 Police arrested 21 people for organising a rave party in Krovvidi village, Nidamaru mandal, Eluru district, where nude dancing took place. Vakamudi Indrakumar, the Jana Sena Party (JSP) village committee president, hosted a lavish birthday celebration on the night of December 12. As part of the celebration, he arranged the rave party on the premises of a rice mill. During the event, young women were brought in to perform nude dances on stage. Around 30 youths were also seen dancing with the women and engaging in inappropriate behaviour, including pouring liquor on the dancers. The disturbing scenes quickly went viral on social media, causing a stir within the JSP. In response to the incident, JSP leaders acted swiftly, with the party leadership announcing the suspension of Indrakumar from the party. The JSP Nidamaru mandal president issued a statement condemning the organisation of such events and suspending Indrakumar for his involvement in arranging the rave party and promoting the nude performances. Meanwhile, Nidamaru Sub-Inspector (SI) Veera Prasad confirmed that a case had been registered and 21 persons were arrested for organising the rave party and nude dancing. The SI stated that organising such events is a criminal offence. Jana Sena party leaders further revealed that there were two factions within the party, with one group allegedly uploading the viral video of the nude dancing on social media.



Severe coastal erosion threatens Vizag's shoreline

PNS ■ VISAKHAPATNAM
 Coastal erosion has struck the Visakhapatnam shoreline, causing severe damage. The protective wall behind the Kurusura Museum has mostly collapsed, and the stretch from the museum to the Children's Park has been heavily affected. The erosion, which began four days ago, has damaged sand dunes, with no signs of relief. Dr VVSS Sharma, Chief Scientist at the National Institute of Oceanography (NIO), Visakhapatnam, told The Pioneer, "While this stretch experiences some erosion every northeast monsoon season, this year's impact is unusually severe." He attributed the intensified erosion to recent weather events. "The Bay of Bengal saw two cyclones in October and increasing sea levels and wave heights, leading to more severe erosion," he explained. He also compared the current situation to the erosion after Cyclone Hudhud in October 2014. "Two months after Hudhud, we saw similar erosion south of the Kurusura Museum, which led to the collapse of the protective wall. This pattern seems to be repeating," he noted. With elevated wave activity expected to continue, residents and authorities have been urged to stay cautious. Dr Sharma stressed the need for sustainable coastal management to protect Visakhapatnam's vulnerable coastline.

November, followed by two depressions in December, all of which worsened the situation," he said. Dr. Sharma highlighted climate change as a major factor. "Rising sea temperatures are increasing sea levels and wave heights, leading to more severe erosion," he explained. He also compared the current situation to the erosion after Cyclone Hudhud in October 2014. "Two months after Hudhud, we saw similar erosion south of the Kurusura Museum, which led to the collapse of the protective wall. This pattern seems to be repeating," he noted. With elevated wave activity expected to continue, residents and authorities have been urged to stay cautious. Dr Sharma stressed the need for sustainable coastal management to protect Visakhapatnam's vulnerable coastline.



Dr VVSS Sharma, Chief Scientist at NIO, Visakhapatnam, stated that while erosion during the northeast monsoon is common, this year's impact is unusually severe due to two cyclones in October-November and two depressions in December.



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PAPER WITH PASSION

Clamour for caste census

While the exercise is fraught with challenges, its potential to uplift marginalised communities cannot be ignored

The demand for a caste census in India has been a recurring topic of debate, reflecting the country's complex socio-political fabric. While proponents emphasise its importance for targeted development and policy-making, critics raise concerns about its potential to exacerbate social divisions.



A caste census would provide granular data on the socio-economic conditions of various communities. This information is crucial for crafting effective affirmative action policies and welfare programmes.

PICTALK



A person dressed as Santa Claus rows a boat as seagulls fly past, near Causeway of Tapi River in Surat PTI

Vipul Nautiyal: Chandan Mitra's calamity reporter

Whether it was crafting flawless editorial pages or recounting tales of his newsroom days, Vipul Nautiyal's legacy is one of dedication, warmth and passion for his craft

He flaunted the title "calamity reporter" with pride as he vividly narrated the story behind how Dr Chandan Mitra, editor-in-chief of The Pioneer, gave him the name.



ended up addressing this "old-looking, humbly dressed" fellow as "Vipul Sir" ever since.

more attention, they had to be perfectly symmetric — a habit that I picked involuntarily. This was the Vipul effect. He once recounted an incident from his days at The Times of India, when Dr Mitra had asked him to return to The Pioneer.

those who worked with him will agree. His way of getting his point across was his own. When I had to negotiate my salary while joining TOI — where he had referred me — he told me to ask for a massive raise, saying: "Purse bhailey hi HR ke paas hai, but tu journalist hai, boli tu lagayega"

(The writer is a former staffer of The Pioneer; views are personal)

Victory Day: Bangladesh's legacy of liberation

Victory Day serves as both a celebration of freedom and a reminder of the challenges ahead in safeguarding its democratic and inclusive aspirations



SANTHOSH MATHEW

Victory Day holds profound significance for Bangladesh, marking its liberation and the triumph over the Pakistan Armed Forces in the Bangladesh Liberation War of 1971.



only the liberation of Bangladesh but also a significant blow to the two-nation theory that had led to the partition of the Indian subcontinent in 1947.



BANGLADESH DEFIED THE ODDS AND BEGAN ITS JOURNEY TOWARD SELF-RELIANCE AND GROWTH. OVER THE PAST FIVE DECADES, BANGLADESH HAS TRANSFORMED REMARKABLY, EARNING THE MONIKER "THE GARMENT FACTORY OF THE WORLD"

equality, education and healthcare, is commendable. It has become a model for other developing nations, showcasing how strategic planning and a focus on human development can lead to sustained progress.

progress. The dreams of Sheikh Mujibur Rahman and the Mukti Bahini have been realised in many ways, with a vibrant democracy, a thriving economy, and a resilient population.

(The writer is an associate professor; views are personal)

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

G7 FACES CRISES

Madam — The 'Group of Seven' or G7 countries are considered to be the group of the richest countries in the world. But after the Covid pandemic, their economic condition also seems to be almost in shambles.

TRUMP DEMANDS EQUAL TARIFFS

Madam — Donald Trump, the newly elected President of the United States,

R Ashwin retires from international cricket



Ravichandran Ashwin, India's second-highest Test wicket-taker (only behind Anil Kumble's 619 wickets), announced his retirement from international cricket at the age of 38.

et journey, from a fringe player in the 2011 World Cup to one of India's greatest match-winners, has been marked by trials, triumphs, and unwavering dedication.

has proposed a "Reciprocal Tariff" policy, signalling a new direction in global trade. Criticising the high tariff policies of countries, including India, he highlighted them as a source of inequity.

conflict will not be limited to economic impacts; it will also have far-reaching diplomatic and social consequences.

TABLA MAESTRO'S LEGACY

Madam — Zakir Hussain's music was intertwined with his all-encompassing love for everyone without an iota of bias or prejudice. In fact, it reminds one of a popular Kishore Kumar number, "Pyaar Baantte Chalo" (Keep spreading love), from the 1965 Hindi movie "Hum sab ustaad hain."

Bidrut Kumar Chatterjee

Send your feedback to: letterstopioneer@gmail.com



FIRST COLUMN

SRI LANKA-INDIA:
ON THE SAME PAGEBoth nations reiterate commitment to defence
collaboration and regional stability

KUMARDEEP BANARJEE

India strengthened its ties with its closest maritime neighbor, Sri Lanka, this week, countering the growing influence of China in the island nation. Sri Lanka's President, H.E. Mr. Anura Kumara Disanayaka, made his first bilateral visit to New Delhi following the recent presidential and parliamentary elections. Earlier this year, President Disanayaka had also visited Delhi at a time when Sri Lanka's political future, including the timing of its elections, was still uncertain. The new President came to power riding on the left-leaning party, which is known to have harboured some Anti-Indian sentiments in the past. However, New Delhi chose to bet on the relatively young Marxist leader, hoping for a sense of prudence in future. Disanayaka in the past, has managed to maintain a fine balance in Sri Lanka's bilateral relations with India and China, not trying to get caught in any crossfire.

Meanwhile, while India's military tensions with China have de-escalated in the recent past, it still chooses to be cautious. Special Representatives from India and China also met this week in Beijing, to discuss their mutual bilateral relations. It seems that with the Trump administration back in the Oval Office in January, China wants to de-escalate military tensions with countries it considers as rivals. China is aware that Trump is likely to impose tariffs on many of its exports to the US, and perhaps further tighten the transfer of high-end technology from America. It is acutely aware that, India would not join an economic dialogue unless the overarching military issues are sorted. It is against this background, that Sri Lanka President's visit to India assumes significance. It may be recalled that China had in the past, sent spy ships



(which it calls maritime research vehicles) to Sri Lankan waters, which have raised many red flags for the Indian security agencies.

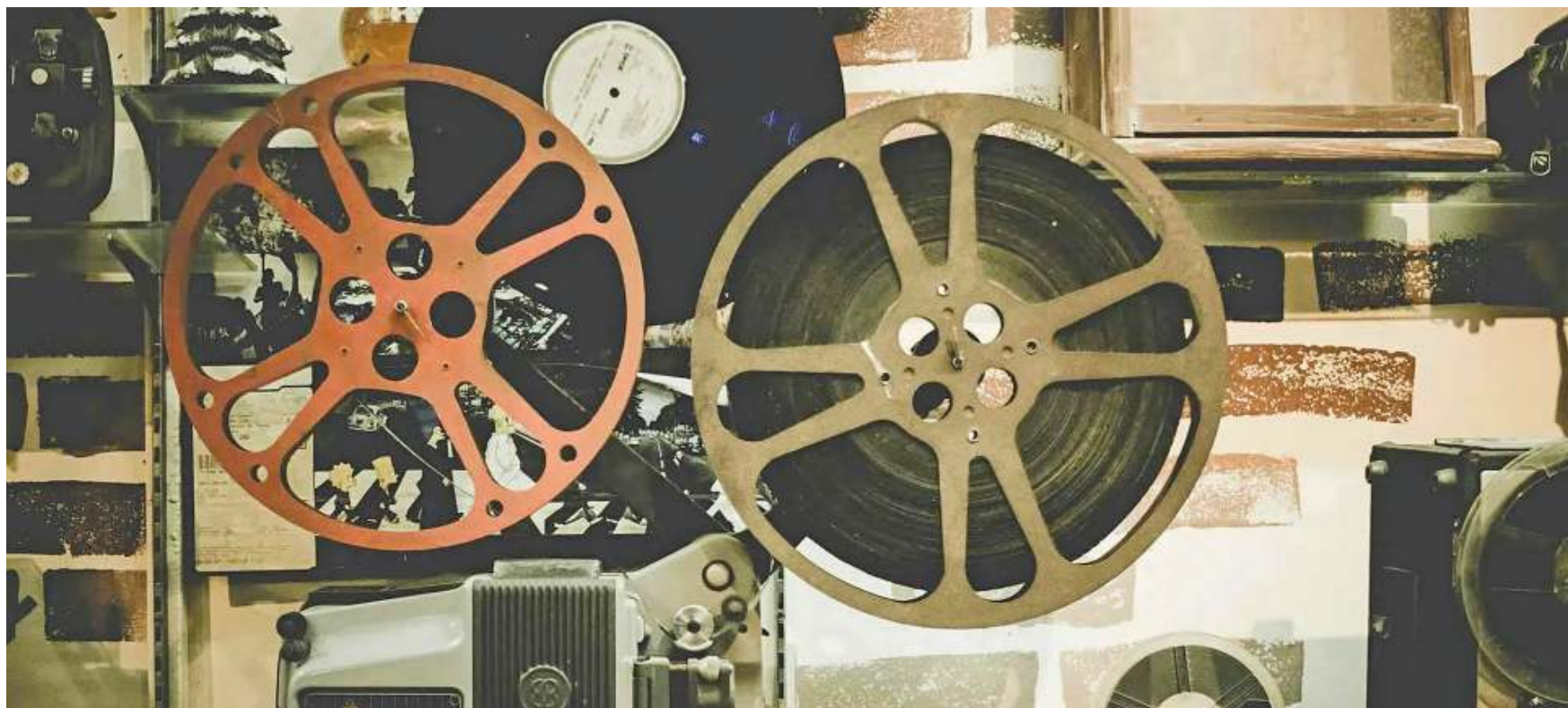
China also controls critical ports in Sri Lanka, which during any military conflict could be used for strategic purposes. Sri Lanka's President is aware of his country's dependence on China to keep its economy afloat, while, also not trying to disturb the deep bilateral partnership with India. It was heartening for policy watchers in India to note that the Sri Lankan President chose Delhi to be his port of call after getting elected and came out with some emphatic statements, regarding not allowing, their national territory to be used for any anti-India activities. The joint statement released after the President and Indian PM's meeting read "Recognising shared security interests of India and Sri Lanka, both leaders acknowledged the importance of regular dialogue based on mutual trust and transparency and giving primacy to each other's security concerns. India is Sri Lanka's closest maritime neighbour, President Disanayaka reiterated Sri Lanka's stated position of not permitting its territory to be used in any manner inimical to the security of India and towards regional stability."

Taking cognisance of India's security concerns the two nations further reiterated to "Explore the possibility of concluding a framework Agreement on Defence Cooperation; Foster cooperation in hydrography; Provision of defence platforms and assets to augment Sri Lanka's defence capabilities; Intensify collaboration through joint exercises, maritime surveillance, and defence dialogue and exchanges; Extend assistance to strengthen capabilities of Sri Lanka on disaster mitigation, relief and rehabilitation, including through training, joint exercises and sharing of best practices; and Enhance capacity building and training for Sri Lankan defence forces and conduct tailor-made training programmes, wherever required." The bedrock of this relationship is India's generous economic support to Sri Lanka without putting it through non-transparent, self-serving infrastructure loans, which has led to the loss of strategic ports for the island nation.

(The writer is a policy analyst; views are personal)

The evolution of cinema
through technology

CHAITANYA K. PRASAD

Whether through sound, colour, digital effects, or immersive technology,
filmmakers have always sought to expand the boundaries of what is possible

Beneath the flickering lights of an old projector, cinema was born—a dance of shadows and light, whispering stories into the dark.

From silent dreams projected on silver screens to the roaring worlds of colour and sound, cinema has always been a magician, conjuring entire universes with the stroke of a reel. As technology sprinkled its magic dust over time, the cinematic world transformed, evolving from simple moving pictures into immersive journeys that now wrap us in their digital embrace, where imagination knows no bounds. In the late 19th century, cinema was a purely visual experience. Films like Raja Harishchandra (1913), India's first feature film, relied entirely on visuals, as sound was not yet a part of cinematic storytelling. Globally, the Lumière brothers' early works, such as L'Arrivée d'un train en gare de La Ciotat (1895), left audiences mesmerised.

The technology was simple—manual cameras, mechanical projectors, and natural light. But this early era laid the foundation for the visual storytelling techniques that filmmakers would continue to refine for decades to come. The advent of sound in cinema was a game-changer. Alam Ara (1931) became India's first talkie, marking the beginning of an era where dialogue and music played a crucial role in storytelling. Globally, The Jazz Singer (1927) made similar waves, showcasing the transformative power of synchronized sound. Colour, too, began to seep into cinema's world. While Kisan Kanya (1937) was India's first colour film, it wasn't until Mughal-e-Azam (1960) and Hum Dono (1961) that colour became a truly artistic element, bringing emotional depth and grandeur to the screen.

The partially colourised Mughal-e-Azam in particular stunned audiences, giving the larger-than-life historical drama a visual vibrancy that was previously unimaginable. Ramesh Sippy's Sholay (1975) was a groundbreaking film, being the first Indian movie shot on a 70mm screen. Indian theatres were not initially equipped to accommodate this scale, but the format gave Sholay's action sequences a larger-than-life feel, adding to its epic narrative. The film also introduced enhanced stereophonic sound, a novelty in Indian cin-



THE TECHNOLOGY WAS SIMPLE—MANUAL CAMERAS, MECHANICAL PROJECTORS, AND NATURAL LIGHT. BUT THIS EARLY ERA LAID THE FOUNDATION FOR THE VISUAL STORYTELLING TECHNIQUES THAT FILMMAKERS WOULD CONTINUE TO REFINE FOR DECADES TO COME

ema. Shan (1980) followed, introducing impressive special effects such as explosions, action choreography, and stunt sequences, drawing comparisons to Western films like James Bond, with a blend of spectacle and style that had rarely been seen in India. The onset of digital technology and CGI changed the landscape of Indian cinema in the 2000s. Films like Krrish (2006) and Ra. One (2011) ushered in a new era of superhero films and futuristic themes, using advanced CGI and motion capture. Robot (2010), featuring a humanoid robot protagonist, combined impressive VFX with engaging storytelling, marking a turning point in Indian cinema's relationship with technology. As CGI became increasingly prevalent, Hollywood and Indian cinema both embraced digital effects as a core component of storytelling.

Hollywood's Jurassic Park (1993) and The Matrix (1999) showcased the immense potential of CGI. Indian films like Baahubali (2015-2017) set new standards with their breathtaking visual effects, making Indian cinema a global player in the visual effects arena. R (2022) followed suit, pushing the envelope with dynamic CGI-enhanced action scenes. Cinema is now becoming more immersive than ever. James Cameron's Avatar (2009) brought 3D to the forefront of mainstream cinema, while Indian cinema explored immersive experiences with films like Kaala (2018), which offered a 360-degree VR experience. Technologies like VR and AI are now beginning to merge with traditional filmmaking, pushing the boundaries of storytelling even further. Technological advancements have transformed both the creative and commercial aspects of cinema, allowing films to evolve into multifaceted brands. Innovations like high-definition cameras, VFX, and animation have significantly elevated

the quality of filmmaking, enabling large-scale productions such as RRR and Baahubali to create immersive experiences that attract global audiences.

These technological tools have expanded the branding potential of films, positioning them as not just stories, but as global entertainment products. Furthermore, the media and entertainment sector's growth, particularly in India, reflects this shift, with theatrical revenues reaching an all-time high of INR 120 billion in 2023. The business model of cinema has expanded beyond traditional box-office revenue, thanks to digital platforms like OTT services, which offer new avenues for distribution and monetisation. These platforms provide filmmakers with the opportunity to market their films globally, turning local content into international brands. Films now capitalise on multiple revenue streams, including merchandising, digital rights, and exclusive streaming deals. Additionally, high-end multiplexes have begun focusing on premium cinematic experiences, creating "experience zones" that cater to affluent audiences and further enhance the brand identity of films.

Cinema has also become a significant platform for advertising and brand collaborations. FMCG, e-commerce, and tech companies increasingly use films for product placements and promotions, contributing to the industry's revenue. Meanwhile, Indian films are reaching wider audiences across 160 countries, thanks to advancements in content production and global distribution. This expanded global reach is turning Indian cinema into a formidable international brand, with films frequently topping global streaming charts, further proving that technological advancements are integral to both the branding and business of cinema? Recently released films like

Kalki 2898 AD and Stree 2 have pushed the envelope for Indian cinema by leveraging advanced CGI and innovative storytelling techniques. Kalki 2898 AD embraced futuristic narratives, with its visually rich depiction of a dystopian future made possible through cutting-edge visual effects, similar to global sci-fi films. Stree 2 blended horror, comedy, and CGI to craft a unique, immersive experience, further proving that Indian filmmakers are increasingly adept at balancing narrative depth with technological prowess, placing them on the global stage. From the early days of silent films to today's CGI-driven spectacles, cinema has continuously evolved with technological advancements.

Whether through sound, colour, digital effects, or immersive technology, filmmakers have always sought to expand the boundaries of what's possible. The future of cinema technology promises exciting advancements. Virtual reality (VR) and augmented reality (AR) are set to provide even more immersive storytelling experiences, allowing audiences to interact with cinematic worlds in unprecedented ways. Artificial intelligence (AI) is also emerging in post-production, helping streamline visual effects and editing processes. Additionally, innovations in 3D and holographic projections could redefine how we experience films in theatres and at home. Advances in sound technology, like spatial audio, will make the viewing experience more immersive, ensuring cinema continues to evolve. The cinematic journey, it seems, is far from over—technology is pushing the boundaries further, transforming both the art of storytelling and the audience.

(The writer is a former additional DG, DFF and Festival Director, IFFI; views are personal. Inputs by Zoya Ahmad and Vaishnavi Srinivasan)

Rajasthan's Golden Horizon: From cultural marvel to investment powerhouse

With the success of 'Rising Rajasthan Investment Summit 2024,' the state is poised for an economic transformation

Sone ri dharti jathe-ar chandi ro aasman - translates to "Where the earth is made of gold and the sky is built with silver." This cherished folk song beautifully captures the essence of Rajasthan's Thar Desert. Today, these words remain as relevant as ever, reflecting the state's unique charm and its emergence as a hub of global investment opportunities. Rajasthan, India's largest state, is rich in minerals, endowed with vast solar and wind energy resources, and brimming with potential for investors worldwide.

The Rajasthan Government has successfully hosted the 'Rising Rajasthan Investment Summit 2024' in Jaipur this week. Throughout the event,



MOHIT TANTIA

memorandums of understanding (MOUs) totalling over Rs 35 lakh crore were signed, highlighting the immense investment potential of the state. Actually, very few places can match with Rajasthan's allure. It boasts nine UNESCO World Heritage Sites, iconic palaces and forts, 320 sunny days a year, powerful winds, and expansive land. Combined with excellent law

and order and robust rail connectivity, these factors place Rajasthan in a league of its own as a destination for investment. Currently, the state is undergoing an economic transformation. The government aims to propel Rajasthan's economy from \$180 billion to \$350 billion by enhancing the Ease of Doing Business and creating employment opportunities for the youth.

Over the next five years, the administration seeks to generate one million jobs across private and public sectors, with a focus on attracting significant investments. Chief Minister Bhajan Lal Sharma envisions Rajasthan as a pivotal player in India's economic growth. His administration is fostering a

pro-business environment across industries, recognising that Rajasthan's development is integral to achieving the vision of a "Developed India" by 2047. Rajasthan's rich natural resources, skilled workforce, and outstanding connectivity make it a magnet for investments.

Over 58 per cent of the Delhi-Mumbai Industrial Corridor (DMIC) and 39 per cent of the Dedicated Freight Corridor (DFC) pass through the state. This infrastructure connects Rajasthan to domestic and export markets, while its proximity to northern states and western ports ensures seamless trade access. With the third-largest national highway network and second-largest rail network in India, along with



nine inland container depots, seven airports, and an air cargo complex, Rajasthan is a logistical powerhouse. Rajasthan's investment prospects span diverse sectors: petroleum infrastructure, food processing, education, chemicals, electronic systems, automotive, electric vehicles, and renewable

energy. Traditional industries like tourism, and emerging fields like startups, also offer immense potential.

For instance, in agriculture and agro-processing, Rajasthan is a top producer of mustard, millet, guar gum, fenugreek, isabgol, and medicinal crops. The sector contributed 29 per cent to the state's Gross State Value Added (GSVA) in 2022-23. The state also ranks second in livestock population and milk production and is a leader in spices, organic farming, and coarse wool. With these advantages, the agriculture sector presents vast opportunities in agri-food parks, warehousing, and cold chain facilities. Rajasthan's journey from a

cultural and historical treasure to a thriving investment hub reflects its unparalleled potential and forward-looking vision. The state's abundant natural resources, excellent infrastructure, and strategic location make it an ideal destination for investors across various sectors, from renewable energy and agriculture to manufacturing and technology. With an ambitious economic transformation underway, Rajasthan's government is committed to creating a pro-business environment that will not only attract global investments but also create employment opportunities for its youth. As the state continues to capitalise on its diverse strengths, the "Rising

Rajasthan" initiative stands as a testament to its growing prominence on the global stage.

The government's efforts, backed by strategic partnerships and forward-thinking policies, position Rajasthan as a key player in India's economic future, driving growth, prosperity, and development.

The initiative seeks to bolster Rajasthan's industries, create jobs, and amplify its economic potential, ensuring the timeless folk song "Sone ri dharti jathe-ar chandi ro aasman" resonates on a global stage.

(The writer is Executive Member, National Institute for Locomotor Disabilities, Kolkata. Views expressed are personal)

Shehnaaz Gill's *Ikk Kudi* in cinemas on June 13, 2025

Punjabi cinema is set to witness yet another heartwarming and compelling story as *Ikk Kudi*, starring the immensely talented Shehnaaz Gill, gears up for a worldwide release on June 13, 2025. The film boasts a stellar ensemble cast, including National Award winner Nirmal Rishi, Sukhi Chahel, Harby Sangha, Gurjazz, Uday Bir Sandhu and Juss. Directed by Amarjit Singh Saron, the genius behind Punjabi blockbusters like *Honsla Rakh*, *Saunkan Saunkne* and *Kaala Sha Kaala*, *Ikk Kudi* promises to deliver an impactful story. *Ikk Kudi* also marks Shehnaaz debut as a producer. It is also produced by Kaushal Joshi and Amarjit Singh Saron.



ARE TAYLOR SWIFT & TRAVIS ENGAGED? INTERNET IS CONVINCED, THOUGH!

Taylor Swift's recent Eras Tour-themed party has ignited engagement rumors with NFL star Travis Kelce. The speculation arose after Brittany Mahomes, wife of Kansas City Chiefs quarterback Patrick Mahomes, shared photos from the event on Instagram. In one image, fans noticed that Swift's left ring finger appeared blurred, leading to conjecture that she might be concealing an engagement ring. Adding to the intrigue, some fans observed that Swift wore a red friendship bracelet featuring white letter charms, which they believe spell out "KELCE." This detail has further fueled speculation about a possible engagement between Swift and Kelce. The party, held to celebrate the conclusion of Swift's record-breaking Eras Tour, featured guests dressed in outfits inspired by her various album eras. Brittany Mahomes donned a silver fringe mini dress reminiscent of Swift's "Fearless" era, while Patrick Mahomes wore a suit, aligning with the event's theme. While neither Swift nor Kelce has publicly addressed the engagement rumors, the online buzz continues to grow as fans eagerly await any official confirmation.



PRIYA ATLEE'S 'DREAM COMES TRUE' WITH *BABY JOHN*

The powerhouse duo Atlee and Priya Atlee are making their Bollywood debut with *Baby John*. Produced under their banner, 'A for Apple Productions', the highly anticipated action film stars Varun Dhawan in the lead role and is directed by Kalees. The film, featuring an ensemble cast, is set to have a grand release in cinemas on December 25, 2024. Ahead of the grand release, the team hosted a grand event where Priya Atlee, shared her

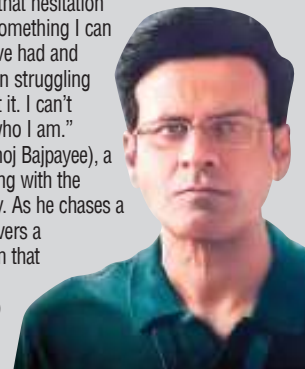
heartfelt emotions about this project and said, "We are very happy to be here because it's like a dream come true for us. We are just babies this is our first production in Bollywood." She also extended her thanks to Murad Khetani and lead actor Varun Dhawan, adding, "I would like to thank Murad, sir. We learned a lot from him and he handled this project with so much love. He is a family now to us. Thank you, Varun sir, for trusting us."

Priya further expressed her appreciation for her husband Atlee, stating, "I learned a lot from him." She also extended her heartfelt thanks to the entire cast and crew, particularly director Kalees, whom she described as "a family member." Speaking about his role in their journey, Priya remarked, "We are proud to launch our own family member Kalees. He is a friend to us and has been with us throughout our entire journey."

'I've always been hesitant'

MANOJ BAJPAYEE ON INTIMATE SCENES

Manoj Bajpayee has been one of those rare actors who makes you sit up and pay attention every time he's on screen. With an impressive career that spans over two decades, he's become synonymous with powerful performances. His latest film *Despatch* on ZEE5 that's setting the screens on fire. The film, which delves into the gritty world of crime journalism, has earned rave reviews, with critics and fans alike praising Bajpayee's performance as Joy Bag, a seasoned crime journalist who ventures into troubled waters when he attempts to uncover a 2G spectrum scam. In a recent conversation, Manoj Bajpayee opens up about his approach to intimate scenes, his unique acting style and the personal struggles that make him one of the most admired actors in the industry. When asked how he makes his female co-actors comfortable during intimate scenes, Manoj Bajpayee shared, "This is where Kanu Behl's (director) expertise comes into play. It all starts with the workshops. As a person, I have always been held back. Being a village boy, I've always been hesitant. No matter how many years of experience or workshops I've gone through, that hesitation remains a part of me. It's not something I can just shed. It's the upbringing I've had and the place I come from. I've been struggling with it and I'm very open about it. I can't completely remove that from who I am." *Despatch* follows Joy Bag (Manoj Bajpayee), a veteran crime journalist grappling with the digital shift in the news industry. As he chases a career-defining scoop, he uncovers a dangerous Rs 8,000 crore scam that threatens not only his professional reputation but also his life.



Raj Kundra on 'rebuilding' self from rubble: 'Not letting anyone tear it down'



For the past three years, businessman Raj Kundra has been at the center of media scrutiny and public controversy due to allegations of creating and distributing pornographic content through mobile apps. Recently, the businessman cleared the air regarding these allegations, categorically denying his involvement in producing pornographic content. In a candid conversation, Raj Kundra revealed how the matter came to his attention. "I had an issue with someone—a business rival—and I didn't think they would have the courage to involve me in such things. But when I was in police custody, late at night, people would come and say that it was someone from the inside who

was behind this. That's when I started understanding the message coming through loud and clear—this was a vendetta, a personal grudge. Someone was trying to pull me into a bigger game. Slowly, things started coming to light and I received a lot of information," Raj Kundra shared. Further he adds, "After that, I wrote to the authorities, naming those I believed were involved in this entire system. There's a lot to uncover here and as more truths are revealed, it will become evident that this isn't just about vendetta." Raj Kundra was arrested in July 2021 on charges of violating obscenity laws, cheating, and conspiracy. The Mumbai

Police began investigating after receiving a complaint about pornographic videos being uploaded to certain mobile platforms. Kundra and his associates were accused of operating an app called HotShots, which reportedly hosted explicit content produced by his company. However, Raj Kundra recently shared his side of the story for the first time, reflecting on his journey of resilience and his faith in justice. "I will be rebuilding myself from the rubble. I will not let anyone tear it down without a fight. I owe it to myself, to my family and to everyone who has believed in me to stand tall and see this through to the end," he concluded.

FUN

ARCHIE



CALVIN AND HOBBS



GARFIELD



NANCY



GINGER MEGGS



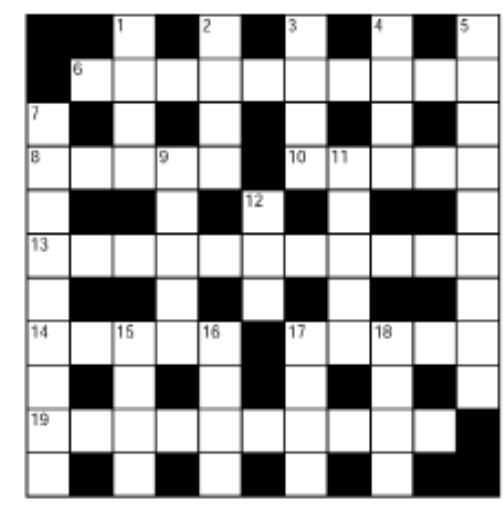
REALITY CHECK



SPEED BUMP



CROSSWORD



SUDOKU

3		8	7	5				
4	5							
	6		5					1
			5	6	4			2
				2				
5		1	7		9			
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			2		3	5		6

Yesterday's solution

5	7	9	6	4	1	2	3	8
2	1	6	8	9	3	4	7	5
4	8	3	7	2	5	6	1	9
3	4	5	2	1	9	7	8	6
6	2	7	4	3	8	9	5	1
8	9	1	5	7	6	3	2	4
1	3	4	9	5	2	8	6	7
7	5	8	3	6	4	1	9	2
9	6	2	1	8	7	5	4	3

- Rules
- Each row and column can contain each number (1 to 9) exactly once.
 - The sum of all numbers in any row or column must equal 45.

ACROSS

- An illness that gives you red spots that itch (7-3)
- Say
- Tongans live here
- Insects with large, often colourful wings
- Not together
- Worship
- A book with words and their meanings
- These have doors and you store things in here
- Go in
- Lubricated
- Remove moisture from
- A curved support under a bridge
- A small tree branch
- A female relation
- A rower uses these

DOWN

- Closed
- A skin mark from a wound
- Take a break from work or play
- Twirl
- Completely tired out



'Exploitation of artists is something I'm wary of, especially when travelling to new places'

TRAVELOGUE

TEJAL SINHA
 tejal.sinha30@gmail.com

Travel is a celebration of freedom, a gateway to new perspectives and a constant reminder that the world is filled with endless stories waiting to be explored. For Sreerama Chandra, travel is not just a part of his career—it's a way of life. As a celebrated singer who has performed across the globe, he has spent countless hours in airports, on flights and in far-off destinations, weaving unforgettable memories along the way.

Sreerama Chandra, celebrated singer and performer, has been a globetrotter for much of his career. In an exclusive interview with *The Pioneer*, the artist opened up about his extensive travel experiences, the joys of performing and the destinations that remain on his bucket list.

"For me, travelling is second nature," Sreerama shared. "Half of my life, I've spent on airplanes. From about 2010 to 2024, I've completed three passports, and my fourth is about to be filled up in just a couple of months." He credits his packed performance schedule for this impressive feat, as his career often takes him across continents.

Speaking about his recent trip to Dubai, the *Subhanallah* singer recalled it as a mix of work and leisure. "I had a show in Dubai, but I stayed back for a few days to explore. I indulged in some shopping, visited different restaurants and even had some peaceful moments by the beach enjoying Arabic cuisine," he said. Reflecting on his previous trips, he shared highlights like skydiving over the iconic Palm Jumeirah and taking his father along for a thrilling desert safari. "Dubai is such a fascinating place—it's just a few hours away, yet it feels like an entirely different world with unique rules, geography, and culture," he noted.

While the *O Rendu Prema* singer cherishes his international trips, he remains deeply connected to his roots. "India is unparalleled. No matter where I travel, there's a feeling of belonging here that no other place can offer. You don't need a visa or passport to explore its beauty, and every corner of the country feels like home," he said passionately.

Traveling for work comes with its challenges. Recalling a harrowing experience in the United States, he said, "A promoter had paid me only half the amount for a show and promised the rest before the performance. However, as the time approached, he refused to pay, leaving me in a tough spot. Being in a foreign country, it was daunting. I had to escalate the matter to officials before the payment was made." Such incidents have made him cautious about working with unfamiliar teams abroad. "Exploitation of artists is something I'm wary of, especially when traveling to new places," he admitted.

For the *Sarphira* artist, performing is more than just a job—it's about connecting with audiences who truly value his work. "I love singing for people who recognise and appreciate me. There's a certain magic in performing for an audience that has been waiting for you, especially in college or

corporate shows where the energy is unmatched," he said. He revealed that he prefers not to perform in settings where there's a lack of connection, such as generic wedding gigs. "I only take up weddings where the clients specifically want me and reach out to me. Respect and mutual appreciation are very important to me as an artist," he explained.

Despite his extensive travels, there are still places Sreerama dreams of exploring. "Paris and parts of Europe remain on my bucket list. I've also never been to South America, which is a region I'm eager to explore," he said. "Closer to home," he expressed an interest in exploring India's northern terrains. "I've been hearing a lot about places like Manali and Uttarakhand. I've never experienced snowfall and it's something I'd love to do."

When asked about his downtime, he confessed that he's a homebody at heart. "When I'm not travelling or working, I love staying at home—whether it's in Hyderabad or Mumbai. It's the perfect time to relax, watch web series, or catch up with friends over a good meal," he said.

For him, travel is both a necessity and a joy, offering him the opportunity to experience different cultures and connect with fans across the globe. Whether it's performing in front of thousands or simply enjoying a quiet moment by the beach, every trip leaves a lasting memory. As he looks ahead, Sreerama remains ready to pack his bags and explore new horizons while staying grounded in his love for home.

With years of jet-setting behind him, completing multiple passports, and countless performances in diverse destinations, **Sreerama Chandra**, in an exclusive chat with *The Pioneer*, shares how travel fuels his creativity, offers moments of solace and connects him to cultures and experiences that leave a lasting imprint



Winter's deadly grip: Cardiovascular cases surge in cold weather

As the temperature lowers, the danger of heart-related diseases is on the rise, making winter a tough season for cardiovascular health. Research studies have shown that the risk of heart attack increases up to 53% in winters compared to summers. Such seasonal increase necessitates increased awareness and proactive heart care during the cold seasons.

Cold weather causes constriction of blood vessels that leads to increased blood pressure, forcing the heart to work hard in circulating blood. With every 1°C drop in temperature, the risk of heart attack increases by 2%. Studies also reveal that there are 26-36% more deaths due to heart problems in winter than during summer. In addition, inhalation of cold air may trigger arterial spasms that decrease blood flow to the heart. At the same time, the body's attempt to produce heat accelerates heart rates that further exert the cardiovascular system.

Dr. Amit Bhushan Sharma, Director and Unit Head - Cardiology - Interventional, Paras Health, Gurugram, explains, "The winter season places unique stress on the cardiovascular system. Cold weather not only increases blood pressure but also makes

pre-existing heart conditions more dangerous. Simple steps such as dressing warmly, staying active indoors and monitoring blood pressure regularly can significantly reduce risks. For those with heart conditions, regular check-ups and vigilance are crucial during this time of year."

To prevent heart problems in winter, experts advise some common measures such as wearing layers to keep the body warm, avoiding sudden exertive activities and opting for light indoor exercises instead of strenuous ones, which can strain the heart too much.

A diet with fruits, vegetables, whole grains, and omega-3s also helps regulate cholesterol and promotes cardiovascular well-being. Blood pressure monitoring and vigilance about warning signs such as chest pain or shortness of breath should be considered among the key steps to preventing complications.

Timely health screenings can also allow people to detect potential problems early and receive appropriate care during the winter months.

As the season unfolds, prioritising heart health and adopting preventive measures can significantly reduce winter-related cardiovascular risks and ensure overall well-being.



'Filming in real locations is always challenging, but worth every bit of effort'

In the vast landscape of Indian cinema, few filmmakers dare to venture into uncharted waters with the same fearless intensity as Kanu Behl. Known for his distinctive storytelling that straddles the line between realism and raw emotion, Behl's latest film, *Despatch*, offers a searing exploration of truth, power, and consequence. With the film now streaming on ZEE5, Behl opens up about the gripping partnership with the platform, the gritty challenges of shooting in Mumbai's chaotic real locations and his unique approach to cinema that transforms it from passive entertainment into a powerful conversation.

As *Despatch* makes its mark on ZEE5, Behl reflects on the partnership with a sense of pride and conviction that is palpable. For a director whose work consistently challenges conventional storytelling, aligning with a platform like ZEE5 was an obvious choice.

"I couldn't have asked for a better collaboration than ZEE5," Behl asserts, his words underscoring the strategic synergy between his vision and the platform's ethos. "Over the last decade, ZEE5 has not only backed mass-appeal content but also supported films that carry a distinct voice, often defying mainstream conventions. They've created space for voices that don't just conform to the status quo. In today's environment, where artistic expressions can often be sidelined, ZEE5 is like a breath of fresh air."

This partnership is a perfect match for *Despatch*, a film that refuses to compro-

In a cinematic landscape often dominated by formulaic narratives, **Kanu Behl's *Despatch*** is a daring detour into the raw, unvarnished truths of power and consequence. Speaking exclusively to *The Pioneer*, Behl reveals how his latest work, streaming now on ZEE5, captures Mumbai's soul and sparks a conversation that lingers far beyond the credits

mise on its artistic integrity. Behl sees the platform as a force that encourages diverse narratives, providing a home for stories that may otherwise struggle to find their audience. "It's a platform that understands that cinema isn't just about entertainment—it's about creating conversations. And that's what *Despatch* is: a conversation with the audience."

When it comes to capturing the essence of Mumbai, Behl's commitment to authenticity takes center stage. Instead of resorting to studio sets or staged locations, Behl and his crew opted for the pulsating heart of the city—Dadar station. The choice wasn't just about convenience; it was about embodying the raw energy of the city.



"Filming in real locations is always challenging, but it's worth every bit of effort," Behl admits, acknowledging the logistical hurdles. "We shot at Dadar station with Manoj Bajpayee rather than faking it elsewhere. That decision wasn't just about realism; it was about making the story breathe. The streets, the chaos, the people—it's all part of the fabric of *Despatch*."

Shooting in a place like Dadar station, with its constant hustle and bustle, came with its own set of challenges. But Behl credits his production crew, RSVP Films, and his dedicated team for pulling it off seamlessly, even during the toughest times of the pandemic. "Filming in such locations wasn't easy, but the crew made it possible. The authenticity we captured on screen is all thanks to their dedication and hard work."

What makes Behl's filmmaking stand out is his refusal to impose a singular message on the audience. For him, cinema is not a vehicle for preaching; it's an invitation to engage, question and reflect.

"I don't believe in telling people what to think through my films," he says, his voice measured but passionate. "Cinema is not about standing on a pedestal and delivering a sermon. It's about having a conversation with the audience. Through the characters, the narrative, and the situations, I aim to present certain ideas—whether it's about power, corruption, or the human condition—but I leave enough space for the audience to form their own opinions."

It's this depth of engagement that sets *Despatch* apart from the typical Bollywood

fare. Instead of handing over clear answers, Behl challenges viewers to think critically about the world in which the story unfolds. "The goal is to create a space where, after the film ends, the audience is still thinking, still reflecting. That's where the real conversation begins—when they engage with the film even after the credits roll."

For Behl, the magic of cinema lies not in delivering a pre-packaged message but in sparking dialogue. "If the audience is still with the film, even when they're no longer consuming the story, then you know you've achieved something powerful. That's when they start to really connect with the film."

With *Despatch*, Behl is carving out a space for cinema that doesn't shy away from complexity, nuance, and a bit of discomfort. As he continues to push boundaries, he's a part of a new wave of filmmakers who are reshaping the Indian film industry—one where stories are told on their own terms, without compromise.

"Cinema today needs to be more than just an escape. It needs to reflect the world we live in, with all its messiness, contradictions and complexities. *Despatch* is my attempt to start a conversation, not just tell a story. I want the audience to think, to question, and to engage with the themes long after they've watched the film."

As *Despatch* continues to captivate audiences on ZEE5, Behl's vision is clear: cinema is not about passive consumption; it's about active participation. And in this bold, thought-provoking film, he's inviting the world to join the conversation.

